DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 145 PS 018 421

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TITLE Implementing a Whole Language Curriculum To Improve Oral Language Competence in an Inner-City Kindergarten.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 124p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *Cooperative Learning; Curriculum Development; Inner City; *Kindergarten Children; *Learning Centers (Classroom); *Oral Language; Parent Participation; Primary Education; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; *Student Improvement
IDENTIFIERS *Whole Language Approach

ABSTRACT

A kindergarten teacher designed and implemented a practicum for increasing the oral language competence of 20 kindergartners in an inner-city public school. Goals were to improve children's receptive and expressive language abilities, social skills, and mastery of kindergarten curriculum objectives, and to increase parent involvement. A whole language curriculum was implemented. Instruction focused on themes that included all curriculum content areas. Coordinated curriculum components were designed to maximize student involvement in class activities. Learning centers and cooperative learning strategies contributed to the establishment of a nurturing classroom atmosphere. Parent participation was encouraged through conferences, newsletters, parent education materials, and parent-and-child activities. Primary teachers were trained in whole language teaching and learning principles and strategies. Practicum evaluation data revealed that the intervention was effective beyond expectation. The intervention increased the children's receptive and expressive vocabularies, improved their use of appropriate language structures, and contributed to mastery of curriculum objectives. It was evident that the program had a positive impact on teachers. (Author/RH)

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Implementing A Whole Language Curriculum To Improve Oral Language Competence In An Inner-city Kindergarten

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Implementing A Whole Language Curriculum To Improve Oral Language Competence In An Inner-city Kindergarten

by

Beverly Metro de la Cruz

Cluster 25

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1989

PS 01821

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Approved:

10-10-89
Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Implementing a Whole Language Curriculum To Improve Oral Language Competence in an Inner-city Kindergarten. Metro de la Cruz, Beverly. 1989: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Oral Language Development/Expressive Language Development/ Receptive Language Development/Vocabulary Development/Whole Language/Language Experience/ Literacy/Inner-city/Low SES/Black/Urban Education/ Kindergarten/Preschool/Elementary Education/Language Arts Curriculum Development/Reading Readiness

The primary goal of this practicum was to increase the oral language competence of kindergarten students in an inner-city public school. Many of the students experienced difficulty mastering the kindergarten curriculum objectives due to poorly developed oral language skills. This practicum was designed to improve the students' receptive and expressive language abilities, foster the development of social skills, increase mastery of the kindergarten curriculum objectives, and increase parent involvement to achieve these ends.

A whole language curriculum was implemented to meet the needs of the students in this community. Classroom instruction was centered around themes which included all of the content areas. Coordinated curriculum components were designed to maximize student involvement in class activities. Learning centers and cooperative learning strategies were employed and contributed to the establishment of a nurturing classroom atmosphere. Parent participation was encouraged through conferences, newsletters, parent education materials, and Parent and Child activities. The primary teachers were also trained in whole language teaching/learning principles and strategies.

Analysis of the data revealed that all of the objectives of this practicum were met beyond projected expectations. This whole language program increased the children's receptive and expressive vocabularies, improved their use of appropriate language structures, and contributed to mastery of the kindergarten curriculum objectives. Parent interviews and questionnaires revealed that changes in the home environment were produced. The impact on teachers was also evident in their interest and desire to implement whole language activities into their primary grade classrooms.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of the School and Community

This public elementary school is located in a low-income, inner-city neighborhood. The building itself is large, encompassing an entire square block. The school houses 18 regular education classes, kindergarten through grade six. Eight of these classes are federally assisted Chapter I programs. The school also houses an exceptional student education center which provides programs for autistic, learning disabled, physically impaired, and educable, trainable, and profoundly mentally handicapped students. Other services include physical and occupational therapy as well as speech and language therapy.

During the last school year the total enrollment of the school consisted of 185 exceptional education students, 581 regular education students, 90 of whom were in the Chapter I program. The federal government has established the criteria for placement in a Chapter I program. A student qualifies for a Chapter I program by scoring in or below the

forty-ninth percentile, in both reading and math, on the Stanford Achievement Test which is administered in April each school year. In an effort to assist these students in improving their test scores and join the mainstream of their peers, these students are provided with a specially tailored curriculum and smaller class sizes in order to maximize student/teacher interaction. The school recently added a federally funded Head Start preschool program as well.

The school building itself is 40 years old and is in need of both major and minor repairs. The classrooms have only recently been air conditioned by the local school board as a measure to help improve the children's test scores. The school had been classified as "deficient" as a result of depressed test scores on the State Assessment of Basic Skills which is administered in grades three and five during the elementary school years. During the 1986-87 school year, a school-wide project to improve the listening skills (and scores) of the students throughout the school was undertaken as this school's participation in the Quality Instruction Incentives Program (QUIIP). The test scores did, indeed, improve dramatically. The school was not only

removed from the deficient list, but was successful in achieving QUIIP status in competition with other participating schools. As a result of having successfully achieved QUIIP, the teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff all received financial bonuses and the school was awarded $1,000.00 to be spent specifically for non-instructional purposes and solely on the children.

All of the students in the regular education program live in the same neighborhood as the school. Approximately 85% of the students receive free lunch. According to the 1980 Census, the average yearly income in this neighborhood is $11,621.00.

Many of the students live in some form of extended family and/or in a multiple family setting. It is not uncommon for the grandparents to house the children of several of their offspring. The children's parents may or may not be present in the home. Increasing parent/guardian participation in the school and its programs continues to be a school-wide priority.

Many of the teachers in this school are dedicated and committed to providing the best possible education for their students. In addition to normal teaching duties and professional

requirements, the teachers have added responsibilities for the smooth functioning of every aspect of the school. This school is participating in the County's School Based Management/Shared Decision Making (SBM/SDM) pilot project.

The faculty voted overwhelmingly to participate in this project and has spent countless hours dedicated to its success. Teachers have had to assume additional responsibilities and a heavily burdened workload since the project's inception two years ago.

The Writer's Role

The writer is a kindergarten teacher and was the kindergarten team leader in the school for the past two years. This year, however, she was elected as the Primary Grade Chairperson. The writer is, then, a spokesperson for the teachers of kindergarten through grade three and is responsible for communicating the needs and desires of the primary grade teachers to the administrators as well as to the other faculty members. In her capacity as Primary Grade Chairperson the writer is a member of the Educational Cabinet (E.C.) which is the decision-making body of this School Based Management/Shared Decision Making (SBM/SDM) school.

While serving as the kindergarten team leader, the writer was working with the lower achieving kindergarten students. In an effort to provide developmentally appropriate programs to all of the kindergarten children, the children who evidenced a lack of readiness skills, when screened with the Cooperative Preschool Inventory (CPI), were grouped together. This program attempted to provide the students with those experiences and activities that would be essential for a successful kindergarten experience.

The writer was selected to develop and implement this program by the administrators. It was felt that her training and experience in exceptional student education, as well as in early childhood education, would serve to make her the most qualified person for the position.

For similar reasons, the writer was assigned as the Chapter I kindergarten teacher this year when the federal program was expanded to include service to kindergarten students. This federal funding augmented the school's existing early intervention program substantially by providing a paraprofessional for the classroom along with supplemental materials

and support services such as access to the computer lab.

As a part of the School Based Management/Shared Decision Making project, the writer was responsible for designing a new kindergarten report card as was deemed necessary by the kindergarten teachers. The new report card was designed to provide more information for parents by incorporating a checklist of many of the specific skills that comprise the kindergarten curriculum. In this way the parents can see exactly which skills the child has mastered as well as those in which the child may need additional assistance. By outlining the child's specific strengths and weaknesses in this manner, the parents can see exactly where their attentions should be directed in order to help their children do better in school. The new report card, too, is distributed every six weeks, as opposed to every nine weeks, as is customary in this school district.

The writer has been teaching for eleven years in varied school systems and settings. As a bilingual kindergarten teacher in a northern school district, the writer was a workshop facilitator and discussion leader for that school system. She was also selected to participate in the drafting of a public school

document which was later approved and distributed throughout the school system. The writer has also served as a mainstreaming kindergarten teacher, integrating special needs children from an early childhood learning center which was also housed in the school. At this time, too, the writer pursued her interests and earned a Master of Education degree in Moderate Special Needs.

Upon relocating, the writer taught a Specific Learning Disabilities class for three years. She has been in her present teaching position for three years. Since teaching in this southern school district, the writer has been awarded four mini-grants, each for $500.00, from the Foundation for Excellence in Public Education. Monies are collected from businesses and private citizens and awarded in sums of up to $500.00. Those applicants judged most worthy by the panel of judges are awarded the mini-grants. The writer has received a mini-grant each year since the Foundation's inception three years ago.

When similar grant monies became available through the Citicorp Success Fund, this writer was also instrumental in assisting her colleagues in acquiring mini-grants for this school year. She

directed an in-service for all of the teachers in the building and later assisted those teachers who were interested in applying for a mini-grant to complete the application process. The writer reviewed and critiqued nine mini-grant applications from 18 teachers (some teachers wrote mini-grants together) in her school. As a result of the teacher in-service and the application critiques, 14 teachers succeeded in acquiring eight mini-grants this year. The applications were reviewed blindly, without regard to location, by the panel of judges, and this school received more mini-grants than any other school.

The school's success in receiving Citicorp mini-grant monies did not go unnoticed, however. Representatives from Citicorp came to the school to interview the participating teachers. They highlighted two of these mini-grant projects in a videotape that they will use for promotional purposes. The local newspaper, as well, has had several articles in the Neighbors section about the mini-grant projects in this school. As a result, several schools in the community have requested that the writer provide similar assistance to their faculties.

In addition to writing mini-grants, the writer was asked by her principal to write a grant for the school. In an effort to stimulate the professional development of teachers, the school board has allocated some funds for educational issues grants to be awarded in sums of up to $3,000.00. The writer was asked to write this grant because of her previous success at grant writing but, more importantly, because she demonstrates a desire to effect educational innovation and improvement in the school as was evidenced in her whole language kindergarten program.

This writer's grant, then, involved leading a team of four teachers to observe a whole language school in New York City. The teachers visited Central Park East Elementary School and will be conducting an extensive in-service for the rest of the faculty when school reopens next fall. It is anticipated that much interest will be aroused in innovative curricula as a result of this trip and the information that was gathered there.

There will be an opportunity for other teachers to get involved in this project as well. Most of the $2500.00 that was awarded to the school for this grant will be used for curriculum development.

Several teachers, along with this writer, will be writing curricula that is specifically designed to meet the needs of the children in this community.

As can be evidenced by the amount of activity and involvement by the faculty in the affairs of the school, this SBM/SDM school offers a wide variety of opportunities for both personal and professional growth. The faculty is committed to improving the education that is provided to the students and has been among a few schools to implement a peer assistance program. The writer was elected by the faculty to be trained by the school system in the Teacher Assessment and Development System (TADS), the teacher evaluation program mandated by the state.

The peer assistance program is consistent with clinical supervision practices in that the objective is not "evaluation" but "assistance." The TADS trained teachers serve as coaches for a team of observee selected observers as well as coordinate the follow-up conferences where suggestions are offered for improved performance. This process is completely optional but has been extremely successful throughout the year. It is obvious that a great deal of trust has been placed in the level of knowledge and in the

abilities of this writer by her colleagues by electing her as a peer assistance coach.

The broad acceptance and success of the peer assistance program at the school has prompted much interest. This writer has submitted an article about the peer assistance program to Wingspan Magazine at the request of one of the assistant principals.

The writer's efforts to provide the most stimulating educational atmosphere possible for her students as well as her contributions to the school as a whole have been recognized by her co-workers. The faculty, which consists of 79 teachers and paraprofessionals, has elected the writer as Teacher of the Year.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Many of the children entered the kindergarten program lacking the necessary readiness skills for success in school. They entered with inadequate language and listening skills, poor social skills, and delayed cognitive development. The children evidenced extremely limited vocabularies and an inability to discuss objects, events, and ideas age appropriately. The lack of pre-literacy experiences in the home compounded this problem. The children did not develop appropriate language skills because they had been limitedly exposed to them. The kindergarten children were, then, experiencing difficulty mastering the kindergarten curriculum objectives due to poorly developed oral language skills.

If this problem were solved, the children would evidence oral language skills compatible with their chronological ages. The children would communicate at age appropriate levels and they would evidence exposure to beginning literacy experiences. They

would demonstrate an interest in books and storytelling, be familiar with nursery rhymes and children's songs, etc. Development of these skills would certainly stimulate cognitive growth and increased levels of mastery of the kindergarten curriculum objectives as oral language and cognitive skills development have long been found to be inextricably linked.

Briefly stated, then, the children in this community, partially due to the predominant use of cultural dialect and the literacy environment in the home, entered school with inadequate oral language skills and experienced difficulty mastering kindergarten curriculum objectives.

Problem Documentation

This problem was documented in the test scores of the children entering the kindergarten program last fall. Each year, the Cooperative Preschool Inventory (CPI) is administered to all kindergarten students within the first eight weeks of school. The CPI is a screening device which measures the area of: language development, auditory perception, language arts/cognitive development, experiential development, math concepts, math cognitive development, math perceptual development, visual perception

development, gross motor development, and fine motor development. The readiness areas tested by the CPI and the number of children (out of 20) found to be deficient in each area can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Cooperative Preschool Inventory Test Results

Skill Tested	# Deficient
Language Development	15
Visual Perception	8
Auditory Perception	9
Language Arts/Cognitive Development	12
Experiential Development	10
Math Perceptual Development	7
Math Concepts	9
Math Cognitive Development	8
Gross Motor Development	0
Fine Motor Development	4

Further, of the children tested, 50 percent scored sufficiently low to have been identified as children eligible to receive Chapter I services. It was anticipated that the identified students would be in need of special assistance in the classroom. The teacher was then required to identify the areas and

the specific skills with which the children were having difficulties and prescribe specific remedies for each child individually. A Chapter I paraprofessional was hired to assist with the prescribed activities.

This problem was also documented by the children's performances on the Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROWPVT) and the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT). The children were screened by the speech pathologists for speech and/or language difficulties. They were then tested with the ROWPVT and the EOWPVT. Children who were found to be significantly deficient in either or both of these areas were further tested upon parental consent. Children who scored more than one standard deviation below the mean and evidenced a 40 percent discrepancy between receptive and expressive language abilities also qualified for language therapy which was provided by the speech pathologists. Language therapy was provided for 20 percent of the children. The children's scores on the ROWPVT and the EOWPVT can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary and Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test Results

Student	ROWPVT Language Age	EOWPVT Mental Age
1	2.7	2.5
2	2.4	2.4
3	2.5	2.6
4	3.2	2.6
5	3.7	3.4
6	4.11	4.8
7	4.9	4.5
8	2.4	2.1
9	2.4	4.9
10	4.2	4.7
11	4.7	4.8
12	3.7	4.2
13	6.0	4.9
14	4.10	5.0
15	4.6	4.4
16	4.11	5.0
17	4.7	7.0
18	3.3	3.8
19	4.9	3.10
20	5.1	5.2

Also, information obtained during parent interviews and conferences revealed that, in many of the homes, there is not a great deal of emphasis on literacy related activities. The parents had been asked, informally, about their child's interests, play habits, family activities, and the literacy environment in the home. These discussions revealed that:

1. watching television (cartoons or a specific program) was listed as among the child's primary interests by all of the parents;

2. children's books were available in only nine of the homes;

3. the children were read to once or twice per week in only six of the homes and three or more times per week in three of the homes;

4. none of the families reported use of the public library; and

5. the most common family activities mentioned were going to church (16), watching television and/or movies together (8), and going to the mall and/or shopping (5).

Causative Analysis

A large part of this problem is directly related to the low socioeconomic status (SES) of the families in this community. Community facilities are limited and the neighborhood is generally considered unsafe for outings and neighborhood play. Even the school grounds do not provide an outdoor play area as attempts to provide climbing structures or swings have been met with vandalism or theft. The children are, then, restricted to playing indoors or very near home.

It is likely, too, as a result of SES, that the home environment does not provide the materials or the learning experiences that are necessary to stimulate a child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Tizard, 1981). Similarly, early literacy experiences are likely to have been limited as newspapers, magazines, and children's books are probably not plentiful in the home (Grimmett & McCoy, 1980).

Also a function of the low SES of these families is that many of the parents are poorly educated themselves and do not have the skills to interact effectively with their children (Shuck, Ulsh, & Platt, 1983). Many of the parents do not read or

write well themselves. Dropping out of school, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy run rampant in this community and many parents are ill-prepared for their responsibilities.

Poorly educated people are likely to have had their own unsuccessful school experiences. These parents are, then, reluctant to get involved in the school setting and in the education of their young children. They are more willing to accept failure and poor performance in school. Low expectations of parents are certain to affect both the attitudes and the achievement of the children even before they enter school.

The lifestyle and the culture of the families in this community also contributes to the problem. Norman-Jackson (1982) studied low-income Black families and concluded that cultural differences, family variables and interactions, and family structures themselves all affect children's language learning success in school.

In addition, cultural dialect is often the only language model in the home and in the community. Smitherman (1977) states, "The Black Idiom is used by 80 to 90 percent of American blacks, at least some of the time" (p. 2-3). It is likely, then, that the

school setting is the child's first exposure to standard English and special efforts must be made to accommodate the language and the culture that these young children bring to school.

The Related Literature

Facilitating the development of oral language skills can be considered, in and of itself, an appropriate goal for early childhood educators as oral language development and cognitive growth have long been found to be linked. DeHaven (1988) writes, "Language occurs in concert with thinking . . . . All the while information is being received or expressed, the mind is busily at work accepting, accommodating, comparing, contrasting, questioning, and/or rejecting. Language shapes thinking, and, in turn, thinking shapes language" (pp. 50-51). According to Nurss and Hough (1985), oral language serves as an effective communication tool as well as a foundation for general academic achievement. These authors state,

> Language influences cognitive growth by shaping the structure of meanings children attach to experiences as they use words to examine details and relationships in their world, explore the range of possible

> solutions to problems, and pose questions to get needed information. (p. 280)

Further, Wood (1981) observed the language acquisition of young children and concluded that there is, indeed, a close interrelationship between developing communication skills and developing cognitive skills and social relationships. Mattick (1981) also found that the growth of cognitive abilities is further linked to interpersonal and intrapersonal growth as children use language to develop self-esteem, self-assertion, self-confidence, and self-control.

Similarly, Dyson (1983) defines literacy as a child's ability to participate in the life of the class. Preschoolers can learn the power of language that enables them to deal with concerns and desires that naturally occur in a classroom setting. Children's concerns are expressed to the teacher and to one another through language, as the young child develops mastery over the social context of the classroom. Effective language, the ability to use the right words in the common langauge of the group, then, is a most important step to developing literacy.

Beardsley and Marecek-Zeman (1987) suggest that literacy begins to emerge with the child's first language experiences: listening, talking, singing, rhyming, and naming. They suggest that all children be viewed as readers at different stages of development as all children are able to read the signs that have the most important consequences for them, such as a parent's stern expression or items labeled with their names. Beardsley and Marecek-Zeman (1987) state that "preschool and kindergarten teachers should offer the young child a variety of opportunities to create connections between 'reading' symbols, communicating ideas and mastering meaning" (p. 160).

Wishon, Brazee, and Eller (1986) suggest that literacy is well imbedded in the social processes of school and family life and that literacy styles and values are transmitted through the diffuse use of language in the ongoing life of the child. Literacy, then, develops best through experiences and in contexts that are meaningful to children, as opposed to activities that are contrived or separate from their day-to-day pursuits. In this way, speaking joins with listening and, later, with reading and writing.

Oral language competence has, indeed, been found to be an integral component of the early literacy efforts of young children. It has been shown that children use talk to provide the thematic content and structure of beginning writing, orally elaborate on its meaning, and seek assistance in encoding words and meanings (Dyson, 1983; King & Rentel, 1979; Lamme & Childers, 1983). Oral language fluency has also been linked to early reading achievement (Applebee, 1979; Cohn, 1981, Nurss & Hough, 1985). Wishon, Brazee, & Eller (1986) emphasize the significance of stimulating language development when they state,

> Language serves to mediate almost all learning because it is so closely related to the cognitive process. For this reason, the development of language and literacy in children is one of the fundamentally important responsibilities of those who care for young children. (p. 91)

The importance of facilitating oral language development takes on an added urgency in a school or community where the home environments are not likely to sufficiently stimulate language development or provide early literacy experiences. Honig (1982) emphasizes the impact of socioeconomic status (SES)

on the verbal environment of the home and on the serious implications on children's language learning that result. Differences in SES have been linked, as well, to other factors that affect language learning in the home such as the impact of parental language style, the nature of the language interactions, motivation for learning, and children's success in school.

Honig (1982) concludes that:

> Young children are reared in environments that vary enormously in the opportunities they provide to learn not only the rule of the language, but also the manifold uses to which language can be put. Language learned must be at the service of children so that they can get their needs met, express themselves, ask and answer questions, comment, talk about past and future events, and reason sequentially. If not, then despite the fact that they may possess basic grammar structures of their language, their chances for success in classrooms and in the world of academic accomplishments may be limited. (p. 66)

DeHaven (1988) summarized studies with inner-city Black children and found that learning was more effective when the children were physically and orally involved. Many of the children in the studies were poor listeners and needed to be actively involved in "doing." Their lifestyle, then, demands that the school setting provide opportunities for interacting with the environment and with one another. DeHaven also emphasized the importance of relating learning to movement whenever possible to make learning most meaningful for Black children.

Facilitating oral language development, literacy, and cognitive growth is the responsibility of any early childhood program. Strategies aimed at determining how best to achieve this goal have been the basis for much research. It is generally agreed that children must be provided with numerous and varied real life experiences and opportunities to actually use the language they are striving to develop. It has been shown that children learn best when they are actively involved and when the content has meaning to them.

Wishon, Brazee, and Eller (1983) emphasize that "children's oral language is based on their experiences (real and fantasized) and that they 'mean

to mean' every time they speak" (p. 93). It is important, then, that the early childhood classroom provide new and varied experiences and help children to gather meaning from them. A rich background of experiences helps provide bases for children's psychosocial and cognitive development and equips them with an experiential framework from which increasing oral literacy emerges. Wishon, Brazee, and Eller suggest that children's experiential bases be broadened through field trips, picnics, walks in the park, selected movies and television programs, fantasy play, and storybooks. As the children become engaged in stimulating learning experiences, they must also be immersed in vocabulary and sentence patterns that extend their linguistic capabilities.

Fisher (1982) further emphasizes the need to create a learning environment that provides new and varied experiences and allows children to explore, hypothesize, converse, and question. Classroom activities must provide a wealth of materials and opportunities for children to express themselves. Fisher suggests that the classroom environment offer blocks for building, concrete objects to manipulate, puzzles to put together, clothes for dressing up, small animals to feed and observe, and books for

browsing and reading. It is also emphasized that there must be time for children to paint or dramatize highlights of their experiences and time to talk about them. An experientially rich classroom environment will, then, serve to stimulate both receptive and expressive language as well as conceptual development.

Nurss and Hough (1985) suggest that the materials or instructional tasks used to elicit language can be manipulated in the classroom. Pictures of familiar objects and people and/or familiar pictures in a sequenced series of events are recommended as effective materials for facilitating oral language development. Nurss and Hough also emphasize the importance of teacher structured discussion, especially when a visual stimulus is present, in order to assist the children to go beyond the picture and use expanded language, dialogue, and story-telling techniques.

Mass (1982) notes that literacy involves both reading and writing and is not a set of abstract skills that must be mastered before they can be used. Instead, the two most important resources that children bring to the tasks of learning how to read and write, according to Mass, are oral language

competence and the ability to learn language as it is needed for new functions. Mass emphasizes that an early childhood program must "expand, enrich, and build on children's knowledge about stories and books, about reading and writing, and help them make connections between what they already know about the functions of language and the real reading and writing engaged in by literate people" (p. 671).

DeHaven (1988) underscores that the ability to use language, both receptively and expressively, is an important prerequisite to reading. Children read language and must, therefore, possess oral language competence. Learning to read is a developmental process whose roots lie in the first stories and poems that are read to the child. Children who grow up with books, and with parents who read to them, begin to develop concepts of literacy long before they can recognize words on their own. DeHaven (1988) writes,

> Once they have the notion that books 'say something,' they begin to role-play reading, making up the story as they remember it. Later, children begin to recognize words and letters, seeing them

again and again wherever they appear on the pages. Reading has begun! (p. 323)

Allen and Laminack (1982) outline the language experience approach to teaching reading which is, as well, a vital tool for assisting children to develop concepts of literacy. Language experience involves using the children's own language to stimulate oral langauge development, develop cognitive abilities, and to build facility with the printed language. Similarly, Reimer (1983) points out that language experience stories are beneficial to children as they stem from the child's own experiences and language. Child centered language experience stories can actually accelerate learning by capturing student interest and focusing it on the reading-writing process. Reimer also notes that an important process for young children is to watch as someone writes their dictation. This type of language experience helps children experience reading and writing as a whole process and helps them see the relationship between oral and written language.

Student dictated stories are an excellent tool for helping young children to develop a concept of literacy but they are not usually sufficiently redundant to provide the student with enough practice

for beginning reading. Reimer (1983) suggests that patterned stories are an excellent device to use with beginning readers/writers. These are often stimulated by reading predictable or patterned books with the students. Since the book provides the language pattern, the children need not create a whole story and the limited vocabulary and sentence structure can provide practice in reading. Children are, then, encouraged to develop and use reading skills when repetitive and predictable materials are used (Bridge, Winograd & Haley, 1983; Burris & Lentz, 1983; Rhodes, 1981).

Goodman (1986) also emphasizes the importance of providing concrete experiences, involving children actively in the classroom, and making language learning relevant. Goodman suggests a "whole language" curriculum that integrates language development and learning through language. Language development and content, according to Goodman, should become a dual curriculum.

> Speaking, listening, writing, and reading are all happening in context of the exploration of the world of things, events, ideas, and experiences. The content curriculum draws on the interests and

> experiences children have outside of school, and thus incorporates the full range of oral and written language functions. (p. 30)

Goodman emphasizes that integration should be the central theme in a whole language curriculum. The entire curriculum (or at least a large part of it) should be coordinated to integrate all of the content areas around a particular topic or theme. Each unit, then, provides a focal point for inquiry, for use of language, and for cognitive development. This allows the students to become involved in the learning process in a real way. Goodman suggests, too, that learning centers are an effective method for integrating language processes with conceptual learning.

Similarly, Smith (1979) states that

> . . . there is only one essential precondition for children to learn about language, and that is that it should make sense to them, both in its content and its motivation. Children come to understand how language works by understanding the purposes and intentions of the people who produce it, and they learn to produce

> language themselves to the extent that it fulfills their purposes or intentions. (p. 119)

In summary, language acquisition has been shown to be directly related to cognitive development. Language serves as a medium of thought processes and of learning. The value of oral language competence, then, should not be underestimated. Oral language competence, then, should not be underestimated. Oral language competence propels children along the path to literacy and to academic accomplishment. Fostering oral language development must be addressed as a critical component of any early childhood program.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Statement of General Goals

Oral language and cognitive development have been shown to be closely interrelated. Oral language competence, too, has been found to be an important prerequisite to developing literacy and to academic achievement. The goal of this practicum was to facilitate the development of oral language, literacy, and ultimately, to increase student achievement in an inner-city kindergarten.

Specific Behavioral Expectations

This practicum attempted to establish a language rich classroom environment which would serve to stimulate oral language development and literacy. It was anticipated that interest and growth in all language areas--speaking, listening, reading, and writing--would result from these efforts.

Increased oral language proficiency, specifically, was expected to result from a stimulating and nurturing classroom atmosphere. The children were expected to comprehend and use

appropriate vocabulary as they became exposed to it through the classroom units of study. The students were expected, as well, to demonstrate increased understanding of language structures themselves by speaking in grammatically correct sentences.

Growth in the affective domain and increased levels of intrinsic motivation were also expected to emerge as a result of this practicum. Students were expected to work independently and/or in small groups for appropriate lengths of time. They were expected, too, to participate actively in large group discussions and activities. Cooperative learning, then, was expected to result from the students' interactions with the environment and with one another.

Parent involvement has been shown to be a crucial component of any school program, especially those of low SES students. This practicum attempted to involve parents in the school and in the kindergarten program. Parents were educated about the importance of their participation in the education of their children and they were given specific suggestions for at-home activities and projects that would help their children do better in school.

This practicum also attempted to educate the primary grade teachers about the whole language approach to stimulating cognitive development, mastery of content curriculum objectives, and improved oral language skills.

The specific behavioral objectives of this practicum, then, were:

1. Increase levels of receptive and expressive vocabulary by an age equivalent score of six months in 15 of the 20 children as measured by the ROWPVT and the EOWPVT.

2. Increase use of appropriate language structures in 16 of the 20 children by dictating grammatically correct sentences during informal classroom observations and through evaluations of student work.

3. Improve CPI test scores to 90 percent mastery in 15 of the 20 children.

4. Increase mastery of kindergarten/first grade readiness skills to 80 percent mastery in 10 of the 20 children as measured by the kindergarten skills checklist.

5. Demonstrate cooperative learning behaviors by 15 of the 20 children by working independently

and/or in small groups through task completion as recorded during colleague classroom observations.

6. Train parents in methods of assisting their children with school work and ways to reinforce curriculum objectives at home with at least one contact per week and with 15 of the 20 parents participating as recorded in teacher logs.

7. Train all of the primary grade teachers in whole language objectives and methods.

Measurement of Objectives and Evaluation Instruments

The success of each of the specific practicum objectives was evaluated differently. Test scores were used to provide the hard documentation as to student progress and practicum effectiveness in several areas. The students were tested with the Cooperative Preschool Inventory (CPI), the Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROWPVT) and the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT) at the beginning of the school year and retested with the same instruments at the end of the year. Progress in language development and in cognitive areas, then, were documented by test scores. In addition, language development and academic progress were monitored by the kindergarten skills checklist, student progress reports and by student work folders.

Teacher observation was also an important evaluation tool that was utilized for this practicum. Growth in the affective domain, increased levels of motivation, and cooperation were evaluated by teacher observation and evidenced in teacher logs and on student progress reports.

Extensive teacher logs were also kept to record levels of parent participation and all parent/teacher interactions. The teacher logs included information about classroom volunteers, participation in workshops, provision of at-home assistance, etc.

The evaluation instruments for this practicum, then, were CPI, ROWPVT and EOWPVT test scores, kindergarten skills checklist, teacher observation, colleague observation/evaluation, student work folders and progress reports, and teacher logs. The broader impact of this practicum was also evaluated by the level of faculty interest in whole language practices that resulted from the teacher in-services as well as through collegial discussions, observations/evaluations.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Much of the research focused on a single theory, method of instruction, or material to be used, but nearly all of the research identified several aspects that were considered to be essential to any early childhood classroom if it is to be effective in facilitating oral language development and literacy. It is universally accepted that:

1. Children must be active participants in the language learning process and they must be engaged in activities that allow for experimentation with listening, talking, reading, and writing.

2. The focus of the program must be on meaningful experiences and on meaningful language by building on what the children already know about oral language.

3. Opportunities must be provided for children to express what they know, think, and feel in order to stimulate both cognitive and affective development in conjunction with developing oral language competence.

4. Reading experiences must be a part of an integrated communication process. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing must be coordinated with other curriculum and content areas.

5. The classroom environment must ensure success for all children and should provide a nurturing atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and experimentation with language.

All of these factors are incorporated into Goodman's (1986) "whole language" approach to learning language and learning in general. According to Goodman, "Language should be whole, meaningful, and relevant to the learners" (p. 9). Goodman also emphasizes the importance of a whole language classroom environment for minority children who are constantly reminded of the distance between their world and the school world" (p. 9).

Goodman argues, too, that schools should build on the language development children have attained before they start school, and on the experiences they have outside of school. Whole language programs, then, "get it together: the language, the culture, the community, the learner, and the teacher" (p. 8).

Fisher (1982) also notes that school programs must make use of the knowledge that children bring to

school with them. "Given the opportunity to apply new information to that which is already known, students' understanding of concepts and related content will be increased" (p. 13).

Goodman (1986) stresses that a whole language program also gets the curriculum "all together." Language becomes the medium of thought and of learning. It is widely accepted that language development directly enters into the learning process. It is important, then, that language learning be integrated into the curriculum content and not be presented in bits and pieces that are irrelevant to the learner. Goodman emphasizes the importance of coordinating the curriculum around topics or themes. Units can provide focal points for inquiry, for language use, and for cognitive development. "It involves pupils in planning, and gives them choices of authentic, relevant activities within productive studies" (p. 31).

Fisher (1982) also stresses the importance of integrating the language arts with each other as well as with other content areas such as science, mathematics, and social studies. Integrated units of study allow for large blocks of time for exploration

and experimentation, and allows the teacher to capitalize on "teachable moments" that may arise.

DeHaven (1988) also describes a language rich environment that incorporates the universal factors that have been identified. DeHaven states, "Language thrives when there are things to talk and write about--questions to ask, ideas to ponder, and responses surging to be expressed" (p. 57).

Incorporating units of study around topics or themes has been shown to be a valuable method of involving students actively in the learning experience. It has also been suggested that children's literature be integrated across the curriculum; within the units of study (DeHaven, 1988; Fisher, 1982; Hennings, 1982; Mikkelson, 1982; Smardo, 1982).

Hennings suggests the use of clusters of storybooks built around the same topic as part of a social studies unit. Concepts can be introduced and investigated through story characters and story forms. Mikkelson also suggests using children's literature in conjunction with social studies units. Children's literature can relate geographical concepts, explore regional customs and settings, and relate historical concepts about other times and

places. Similarly, Smardo notes that children's books that deal with science concepts can help young children make the difficult distinction between what is real and what is imaginary.

DeHaven also suggests coordinating the language arts curriculum with other content areas. Children learn to use language receptively and expressively in communicating about something outside the language arts. It is important, then, that language arts instruction be activity oriented. It should be planned to involve children in learning to use language to communicate. DeHaven points out that strategies are best learned or refined in purposeful interactive situations. "Learning occurs naturally at the intersection where need meets knowledge" (p. 62).

All of the research emphasized the importance of actively involving the children in the learning process. Fisher (1982) emphasizes that they must be active participants of each and every learning activity in the classroom. According to Fisher, the children must feel that what they are doing is important to them in a personal way. Fisher suggests that children work with specific, concrete materials and experiences instead of abstract ideas and

textbooks. "Children need things to touch and examine, build and construct, collect, observe, and categorize . . . . As fantasy must be grounded in reality, abstractions must touch experiences" (p. 4).

Many different methods and specific activities to actively involve the students in the learning process have been identified in the research. Goodman (1986) and Nurss and Hough (1985) suggest the use of large and small group discussions and actual decision-making activities. Children should be encouraged to express their points of view to the teacher as well as to their peers. This will increase communication skills and thinking skills as well.

The use of manipulative materials is also considered to be an effective way of actively involving the students in the learning environment. It has been shown that children learn better through hands-on experiences (Dyson, 1985; Williams & Kamii, 1986). Manipulative materials are also included as important components of learning centers, which are also considered to be a developmentally appropriate teaching strategy for young children (Day, 1983; Myers & Maurer, 1987). According to Day, learning centers provide opportunities for active involvement

of children, experience-based learning, and individualization in order to capitalize on children's developmental abilities, interests and learning styles.

Student-made materials are also presented in the literature as an effective method of actively involving the students in the learning process (Lentz & Burris, 1985). Student-made materials that were identified in the research were language experience stories and/or books (Mallon & Berglund, 1984), caption books (Burris & Lentz, 1983), and ABC books (Jones, 1983). Student-made materials are considered to be extremely beneficial to young learners in that they are developmentally appropriate. Student-made materials offer concrete experiences, involve children actively, and contribute significantly to children's self-esteem (Burris & Lentz, 1983).

Mallon and Burglund (1984) suggest the use of language experience stories and/or books. Language experience activities make use of the student's own language and experiences and demonstrates, too, the connection between spoken and written language. Burris and Lentz (1983) suggest the use of student-made caption books in the classroom as well. Caption books are picture books with short language captions

that are closely related to the simple pictures. Often caption books have simple sentence structures, limited vocabulary and a repetitive theme which make them effective beginning reading materials. Jones (1983) also suggests that children be involved in making ABC books. In addition to providing experience with alphabetizing and language, ABC books can be used effectively to extend concepts through topic or theme development.

Students must be active participants in the learning process but it is essential, too, that the learning experiences are meaningful to the children. Language learning must be both relevant and enjoyable if it is designed to motivate and stimulate young learners. Wishon, Brazee, and Eller (1983) point out that a rich background of experiences helps provide bases for children's psychosocial and cognitive development. Taking field trips (Fisher, 1982; Gentile & Hoot, 1983; Wishon, Brazee & Eller, 1983), engaging in cooking and crafts projects (Goodman, 1986), dictating language experience stories (Mallon & Berglund, 1984; Reimer, 1983), and involving parents in the school program (Croft, 1979; Ferguson, 1984; Gains & Pegg, 1984; Lightfoot, 1978) have all

been identified as effective means of providing meaningful experiences for young children.

Parents can be used effectively to provide meaningful classroom experiences for young learners. Children can relate to their parents and to members of their community in a personal way. In addition to involving parents in the school program to help bridge the gap between home and school, however, much research has shown that parent involvement is a necessary component of any successful school program. Parent participation is of critical importance to the academic success of low SES children where the needs of the children demand that parents and teachers work together.

Parents must be convinced that their contributions are essential to the quality of the program before they will become involved, however. It is important that the goals of the program and the needs of the children be communicated clearly to parents. Frequent parent contacts, through phone calls, letters, notes, and bulletins, are essential for recruiting parents to get involved (Croft, 1979). Parents must be made aware of curriculum objectives and provided with specific suggestions for at-home activities (Ferguson, 1984). It is important, too,

that parents become excited about what actually goes on inside the classroom (Croft, 1979; Gains & Pegg, 1984). Designing interesting and exciting class projects, activities, and outings, then, will be an important prerequisite to attaining parent interest and involvement.

In order to inform parents about the kindergarten curriculum and program objectives, efforts should be made to involve parents in conferences, workshops, and Parent and Child activities. Parents should also be trained to provide appropriate at-home assistance and efforts should be made to train and recruit classroom volunteers. Using parent volunteers in the classroom is especially important in inner-city schools where the enrollment of minority children is high. Lightfoot (1978) suggests that inner-city parent volunteers are important because they not only provide more adults for teaching duties but they also serve to transform the culture of the classroom.

If learning is to be meaningful and motivate students to participate actively, it is important that appropriate classroom materials are available. In addition to the wide use of manipulative materials and student-made books and projects, other materials

have been suggested in the literature. Some of these materials are song picture books (Jalongo & Bromley, 1984), patterned language and/or predictable books (Bridge, 1979; Smith, 1978), and a broad selection of children's literature, including familiar stories (Mikkelson, 1982; Sides, 1982).

Jalongo and Bromley (1984) suggest the use of song picture books as highly motivating and appealing materials for young children. Activities based on song picture books can expose children to the vocabulary, syntax, semantics and the rhythm of language. Similarly, predictable and patterned language materials have a broad appeal for young children. Familiar stories and the ability to predict story outcomes provide children a sense of control and confidence and serve to stimulate and motivate young learners. These materials, then, can motivate children to listen, speak, read, and write in ways that not only facilitate cognitive growth but also promote general linguistic competence.

Mikkelson (1982) and Sides (1982) emphasize the importance of incorporating a broad use of children's literature into the early childhood program. A literature program has many benefits. Through exposure to various forms of children's literature,

children develop a love of literature, increase reading ability, gain knowledge, develop aesthetic awareness, learn about cultural heritage, and gain personal insight. Mikkelson further suggests that stories be extended through drama, drawing, etc., and that children's books be substituted for readiness or basal texts.

An early childhood program that is to be effective in fostering oral language development must create opportunities for communicating ideas, thoughts and feelings. Many activities have been identified in the research as effective in stimulating language use and interaction among peers. Among the most effective methods of stimulating oral language development are encouraging free play (Bruner, 1986; Fisher; 1982; Pellegrini, 1980), socio-dramatic play (Gentile & Hoot, 1983; Lovinger, 1974), imaginative play (Jurkovic, 1978; Yawkey & Hrncir, 1982), student initiated activities such as painting, writing center, . . . (Dyson & Genishi, 1982; King & Rentel, 1979; Lamme & Childers, 1983), use of student journals for drawing, writing, and dictating (Hipple, 1985; Rich, 1985), and use of drawing as a literacy experience which allows children opportunities to reflect upon, organize, and

share experiences (Dyson, 1982; Gentile & Hoot, 1983; Hipple,1985; Lamme & Childers, 1983).

Recent research has identified the interrelationship between play and learning. Pellegrini (1980) has found that concrete objects and experiences manipulated by children at play are the prerequisites to successful acquisition of more abstract skills such as learning to read. Gentile and Hoot (1983) have identified kindergarten play activities that nurture children's developing literacy. Painting makes children aware that images on paper have meaning, helps them differentiate a figure from its background and aids in development of left-to-right directionality. Lettered blocks can also increase several perceptual skills that have been associated with reading such as differentiation of shape, size, sequence and letters. Building with blocks can also lead to discussions about the structural characteristics of the constructions and it promotes use of language to communicate ideas and feelings as well.

Socio-dramatic play has also been found to be an important early literacy activity. Gentile and Hoot (1983) note that socio-dramatic play promotes many social-emotional and cognitive skills and provides

experiences that have been found to expand children's overall verbal competence. It also provides opportunities for children to live vicariously and understand different feelings and points of view. Lovinger (1974) concludes, "The development of socio-dramatic play in preschool disadvantaged children results in the increased use of language, which increases the ability of the children to deal with a cognitive task" (p. 317).

Similarly, Yawkey and Hrncir (1982) have identified the ways in which imaginative play promotes oral language development. Imaginative play fosters oral language development as children describe and explain situations by using descriptive language, use and practice social language, expand creative expression that combines mental and social thoughts, and bridges experiences with role playing, and increasing concentration and attention. The links between imaginative play and communication emphasize the importance of play as a tool for developing oral language in young children. Imaginative play promotes growth, development, and continued expansion of oral language abilities in preschoolers.

Many kindergarten play activities such as using a peg board, pounding clay, putting puzzles together, etc., have all been found to promote oral language development and early literacy efforts of young children. In fact, Bruner (1986) points out that language is more rapidly mastered when situated in playful activities. "It is often the case that the most complicated grammatical and programatic forms of the language appear first in play activity" (p. 80).

Fisher (1982) underscores the importance of establishing a classroom environment that promotes oral language development. According to Fisher, the environment must encourage students' free and active participation. The components that are essential to establishing this type of environment are: the removal of criticism and pressure to conform to predetermined standards, encouragement of participation and establishment of talk as a significant factor to learning, establishment of meaningful conversation as a general classroom patterns, and creating a real need for children to discuss, describe, compare, and categorize things orally. Students can learn from one another and they can learn, as well, from working together.

Goodman (1986) has outlined, too, some objectives for a preschool whole language program. It is stressed that a literate environment, with functional print everywhere, be created. The children must be encouraged to notice it, use it, and respond to it. This environment should also foster an awareness of the functions of print and expand children's sense of books and how to handle them. Goodman also notes the importance of involving the parents in this process.

Goodman also makes specific recommendations for establishing a literate preschool environment. Goodman suggested the establishment of individual centers for writing and listening. A writing center should be equipped with lots of different things to write with and on, and the listening centers should allow children to listen to stories on records or tapes.

A well stocked and varied classroom library is also considered to be essential. Goodman suggests providing different kinds of books such as response books, activity books, and wordless books. It is suggested that children be read to individually and in small groups and that they be encouraged to

participate by following along, predicting consequences, and taking over if they choose.

Goodman also suggests that written language become a vital part of the preschool whole language environment. Written language should be used to tell children what things mean and what they are for and they should be encouraged to guess at what written language says. Written language should also take the forms of charts, bulletin boards, and personal labels. Children should also be involved as "messengers" for written communications between home and school.

Goodman emphasizes, too, the importance of making language learning meaningful and enjoyable. Children should be encouraged to play at reading and writing. They should be involved in "reading" recipes and cooking and other literacy role-playing activities. Neighborhood walks in search of environmental print should also be included as a method of building children's awareness of the functions of print and the importance of literacy.

DeHaven (1988) describes a "doing curriculum" where children are actively involved. Focusing on a topic over a period of time allows children to become involved and engage in thinking strategies. The end

result, DeHaven notes, is that children learn language-mediated interpersonal skills and they also learn more traditional language skills that became necessary to carry out their tasks.

DeHaven also stresses that the tone of the classroom must be one of respect and encouragement. Children should feel free to experiment with language, without consequences. Children should feel accepted and challenged. A favorable language learning environment, then, should be both positive and constructive.

DeHaven states, too, that it is important to consider not only what children will learn, but also how they will feel about learning it. "Positive attitudes enhance children's learning in the classroom and foster continued independent learning" (pp. 63-64).

Description of Selected Solution

This practicum established a whole language program in an inner-city kindergarten in order to facilitate the development of oral language competence and literacy. The classroom environment was both supportive and challenging at the same time. Children were free to experiment with language and in the classroom environment. Numerous and varied

opportunities were provided for children to interact with the teacher, one another, and with the classroom materials in the environment.

An emphasis was shifted, then, away from increasing test scores to increasing motivation and a desire to learn that should serve the children well throughout their educational careers. Too often the priorities of kindergarten programs are dictated by outside pressures to increase student performance on academic assessments alone and at the expense of social and emotional development. The result is that many children fail to meet the expected academic standards simply because the focus of the program is misguided. Children develop cognitive skills as a result of developmentally appropriate stimulation. Cognitive development does not occur in isolation and must be viewed as only one aspect of the developing child. Early childhood educators must concern themselves with the development of "whole" children--how they think, feel and learn--and not solely on academic achievement.

A whole language program addresses all of the children's needs. This program was built on the children's experiences and the oral language skills that they had acquired outside of school and brought

to school with them. Children's active participation in learning experiences was encouraged and a broad base of experiences that were meaningful and relevant to the learners was provided. Oral language competence has been linked directly to cognitive development. A whole language program that is designed to foster the development of oral language skills, then, promotes cognitive growth as well.

A mini-grant was pursued to facilitate the implementation of this practicum. The Citicorp Success Fund has awarded $500.00 to the "Focus" On Learning project which was an important component of this practicum. It was designed to capitalize on the students' natural curiosity and areas of interest. The project stimulated oral language development, pre-reading and reading skills, increased vocabulary, and fostered self-esteem. It served, too, to increase student achievement in all content areas as it was designed to coordinate all subject areas based on the County Balanced Curriculum.

The "Focus" On Learning project involved the compilation of a class book which was an ongoing project throughout this practicum. The book consisted of photographs of the children involved in different classroom activities. The students

composed the text of the book themselves using the language experience method. Language experience has been widely used for many years and has proven to stimulate oral language development, pre-reading and reading skills, as well as to motivate reluctant learners. The stories were composed using the children's own words. The children dictated the story which was recorded by the teacher. Teacher prompting during the picture discussions encouraged the children to expand their sentences and language structures. When writing (dictating) the text to be recorded in the book, then, the children were expected to speak in grammatically correct sentences, sequence events, and use appropriate vocabulary from the coordinated curriculum components.

The class book was also important in educating parents about the kindergarten curriculum. Parents were able to see their children in the act of learning and gained a better understanding of the skills that are taught in kindergarten and the methods that are employed to do so. It also served to interest the parents in the program as well as to assist in bridging the gap between home and school. Parents are more likely to get involved if they have knowledge of the program and its goals.

This project, too, attempted to involve the parents in the education of their children. It has been shown that children learn best when there is open communication and cooperation between home and school. In order to interest the parents in the kindergarten program, it is essential that the students themselves become interested and motivated to achieve. Classroom activities were designed to both motivate and involve the children in the learning process. Interesting class projects served to excite children and parents alike about classroom activities and school events.

The link between home and school was also strengthened as each child wrote his/her own book. The individual books consisted of the pictures taken at school as well as pictures taken at home. In this way each child included pictures of relatives, friends, pets, and other things that were meaningful to him/her. (A camera was available for at-home use.) The same language experience approach was used for the individual books.

The "Focus" On Learning mini-grant project, then, was an important component of this practicum. This project utilized the children's own pictures and words to produce language experience books. Language

experience has been shown to be an invaluable whole language tool. The books that were produced as a result of this mini-grant project served to stimulate oral language, contribute to the mastery of the kindergarten objectives, fostered self-esteem, and helped bridge the gap that existed between home and school.

This practicum also attempted to involve the parents in their children's education in order to maximize the students' educational achievements. Communication is the first and most important step in increasing parent involvement. Parents will become involved if they are convinced that they are needed and that their contributions are essential to the quality of the program. Great educational strides can be achieved when parents and teachers work together.

Frequent parent/teacher contacts are essential for involving parents in the school and in school programs. Parents should be familiar with what goes on in the classroom and they should be informed about specific curriculum objectives that will be taught. Early in the implementation phase of this practicum, then, a workshop was presented to the parents of the kindergarten children to introduce them to the goals

and the objectives of the kindergarten program. Parents were informed, too, of special class events through newsletters and bulletins.

Several Parent and Child activities were also planned. They occurred on Saturdays to ensure that working parents would also have the opportunity to participate in school events. Parent and Child activities allowed parents to become familiar with their child's school setting and to see their children in the act of learning as they interacted with one another and with the environment. Parents were also encouraged to borrow materials and books from the classroom for at-home use.

A whole language program integrates all of the content curriculum objectives around topics or themes. Coordinated curriculum components were designed to facilitate the implementation of this practicum. Their use provided focal points for inquiry, for language use, and for cognitive growth. Rather than introduce isolated bits and pieces of information, coordinated curriculum components exposed the children to the unified whole that has meaning to them. This practicum incorporated the kindergarten objectives from the County Balanced Curriculum around different themes or concepts. All

of the language arts objectives were addressed through the units of study which included all of the content areas.

Children's literature was an important aspect of each coordinated curriculum component and was widely used throughout this practicum. Books and stories were integrated into each coordinated curriculum component and were used to stimulate oral language and listening skills, introduce science, social studies, and math concepts and to reinforce readiness skills. The use of children's literature in this manner was important in that it served as a catalyst for various interdisciplinary follow-up activities. The children had many opportunities to dramatize stories, illustrate books, make puppets of the characters, sequence the events, retell stories in their own words. Children's literature was used, then, as the thread through which the whole language program was bound.

Perhaps the single most significant aspect of this approach, however, was the culminating activities of each coordinated curriculum component. Student-made books were an integral part of each coordinated curriculum component as well. The students made their own books which highlighted the

content objectives of each area of study. In this manner, the students had a concrete reminder of the skills and objectives that were learned and they established their own personal libraries at the same time. The student-made books assisted the children with mastery of the content objectives, focused parent and at-home activities, and instilled concepts of self-esteem and pride in the children as they learned to appreciate books and value the learning process.

In addition to student-made books, however, each coordinated curriculum component included pictures and language experience activities. The children dictated the text for the pictures that were included in the class book which was compiled throughout the implementation phase of this practicum. The children also contributed to their individual language experience books at the end of each coordinated curriculum component. This afforded the children the opportunity to record activities and events in a manner that had meaning to them and maximized student growth and development.

A cooperative learning environment was an important aspect of this practicum as well. The children were provided with opportunities to interact

with their peers as well as with the materials. They learned from one another but they also learned from working together. The children began to develop facility with oral language by engaging in discussions and expressing their own points of view. They developed oral language skills as well as interpersonal skills that become necessary for task completion and to facilitate play. Cooperative learning resulted from large and small group discussions, various play situations, and learning center activities.

Children learn best by doing. It is important, then, that the children were actively involved in the learning process. This practicum employed various methods to encourage the active participation of the learners. Large and small group discussions and decision-making activities were an important aspect of classroom life. Children were also involved by using manipulative materials and completing learning center activities and projects independently and/or in small groups. Student-made materials also ensured the active involvement of the children. The students illustrated or dictated language experience stories and/or books based on previous experiences or areas of interest. Caption books and ABC books were also

compiled through the coordinated curriculum components to explore and expand on the relevant topics or themes that were investigated.

Students must be motivated if they are expected to be active participants in classroom activities and events. Classroom experiences, then, were relevant and meaningful to the learner in order to capture student interest and attention. This practicum provided the learners with numerous and varied experiences, within the classroom and without. The students took neighborhood walks and field trips and were involved in different follow-up activities and projects. Cooking and crafts provided the students with highly stimulating hands-on experiences as well.

The atmosphere of a whole language classroom is extremely important to the success of the program. The students must feel free to interact with the environment and with one another, and opportunities must be created for the children to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and feelings. The relationship between children's play and oral language development is clear. This practicum provided opportunities and classroom activities for free play, socio-dramatic play, and imaginative play. Children were also permitted to initiate and pursue activities of their

own choosing. Drawing and individual journals enabled the children to organize and share their thoughts. They were encouraged to use their journals in ways that met their needs. They were, then, encouraged to write, draw, or dictate about whatever topics had meaning to them.

Whole language programs have been shown to be particularly valuable with low SES and minority populations. It was the intent of this practicum to broaden the use of whole language activities beyond the kindergarten classroom and to impact all of the primary grades. A teacher in-service was conducted which outlined the objectives, methods, and effectiveness of whole language experiences in the primary grades.

The teacher in-services and the level of faculty interest in the whole language approach that was demonstrated afterwards are likely to have broadened the impact of this practicum substantially. The children are certain to benefit from the whole language kindergarten program but they will benefit, too, from the extension of these activities beyond the kindergarten year. They will continue to be exposed to whole language activities throughout the primary grades as the teachers become more and more

familiar with and committed to the whole language concept of teaching/learning. As the children are involved with whole language experiences over and over again, the impact of this practicum will be evident, still, in years to come.

Report of Action Taken

This practicum established a whole language program in an inner-city kindergarten in order to stimulate oral language development and, in turn, cognitive growth. An important aspect of a whole language classroom is that the children are free to interact with one another and with the environment. To achieve this end, learning centers were established in the classroom which afforded the children the opportunity to explore and investigate that which was of interest to them. Learning centers allowed the children to pursue their own interest s and to work individually and/or in small groups.

In order to maximize student interest in the learning centers, the activities were changed frequently, although the centers themselves remained constant for the most part. The learning centers that were established were writing, listening, discovery (science), math, and projects. In addition to the learning centers which contained specific

activities or programmed materials, unstructured activity areas were also established. There were areas for building with blocks, working with manipulative materials, painting on an easel, water play, making and using play dough, and a housekeeping corner.

The classroom library and quiet reading area was also an important area of the room. A secluded area was partitioned to allow children to "read" books of their own choosing alone or with friends. The classroom library was extensive and contained a wide variety of children's books as well as the books that were used in the coordinated curriculum components.

Providing children with the opportunity to interact with one another and to move freely within the classroom was essential. The children were free, then, to experiment with the materials and were encouraged to share their findings with others. Some of the children chose to talk about their experiments while others requested assistance to chart or make a book about their experiences. As each child brought a different level of interest and knowledge to the learning activities, they were permitted, in turn, to respond to these experiences in a way that had

meaning to them. The children were free simply to learn. Where every child benefitted from whole group activities, each child may have learned something different. When making vegetable soup, for example, some children may have learned to name vegetables, another the vocabulary for the utensils, still another about sequencing, or the properties of heat, yet still others, how to recognize the written words in the recipe. Each child brought his/her own level of readiness to each activity and was free to move closer and closer to mastery at his/her own pace. The children were not expected to end up in the same place when they did not begin at a common starting point. Individual progress was monitored, then, but it was not expected that all students would learn the same thing from each activity.

The whole language kindergarten program addressed all of the children's needs as the emphasis was on stimulating growth of the whole child and not on teaching specific academic skills. The experiences, knowledge, and language that the children brought to school became an important component of the school program. The active participation of the children in meaningful classroom activities and events was of utmost importance.

Learning activities that were related to the students' personal lives ensured their active and dedicated participation.

The "Focus" On Learning mini-grant project was a good example of the kinds of activities that were employed to maximize student involvement and to provide meaningful cultural and language experiences in the classroom. The gap between home and school was considerably narrowed as the students shared pictures of themselves and their loved ones at home or play. The children were personally involved, in a real way, in producing their own books as their own language was recorded for each picture. They enjoyed talking about their families, friends, and activities and they enjoyed sharing their books with classmates as well as "reading" each other's books. This project, then, stimulated the development of oral language, pre-reading and reading skills and actively involved both the children and their families in meaningful learning activities.

In addition to the individual language experience photo albums, a class book was compiled which highlighted classroom activities and events. The class book was sent home overnight with each child and became an important parent education tool.

Many of the parents were unable to attend conferences and/or school events but all of the parents viewed the class book at some point during the year. Each child took the book home for an evening so that even the most reluctant parents had some exposure to the classroom. They gained a better understanding of what is taught in kindergarten as well as some of the methods and materials that are employed to do so.

Many of the most exciting classroom events centered around the science activities. The children hatched eggs in an incubator, watched a caterpillar spin a chrysalis and later emerge as a butterfly, sprouted sweet potatoes, planted flowers, maintained a garden, constructed a tepee, built a wagon, observed fish and tadpoles grow into frogs, etc. Although parents were informed about all aspects of the kindergarten program, it was the students' enthusiasm about these experiences that brought the parents to school and/or interested them in the kindergarten program.

Much emphasis was placed on keeping parents abreast of what was going on in the classroom, why it was important for their children, and how they could extend these activities at home. Parents, like the children, need to become excited about the school

program and activities and must be motivated to participate as well. The class book was a very effective tool to show parents what goes on in kindergarten and to demonstrate how children learn best.

Parent education was an important component of this practicum. Not only did parents lack knowledge about the kindergarten curriculum, but they harbored misconceptions about how to help their children learn. Many parents reported helping their children get ready for school with workbooks and flashcards and, as a result, became frustrated with their children's lack of interest, attention, and progress in school-related tasks. The parents, too, were embarrassed as their children reported that their favorite activity at school was "play."

Much of the parent education, then, focused not on "what" to teach their children but on "how" to teach them. It was important for the parents to understand that play is not a dirty word and that learning should be fun. Subsequent parent conferences and bulletins focused on activities that would be fun as well as educational. Parents were encouraged to play with their children and to provide verbal stimulation during play. The result, of

course, was that the children were much more responsive to school-related tasks. The parents were also much less reluctant to help their children at home and more pleased with their progress.

In order to recruit parent assistance in the classroom and/or at home, parents were made aware of appropriate methods and materials that could be employed to help their children master the kindergarten objectives. The Helping Hands newsletter which contained specific suggestions for at-home activities and projects was distributed weekly. The newsletter provided specific suggestions for at-home activities that would be fun as well as educational and which provided a brief explanation of the importance of these and related activities. Directions for creating manipulative materials were also provided. A list of the supplementary parent information materials that were used for this practicum can be found in Appendix A.

In addition, the parents were kept abreast of their children's progress in school. Report card grading periods were changed from nine to six week periods in order to better inform the parents about their children's progress. Along with each report card the parents received information about the units

of study, projects, and curriculum objectives that would be covered during the subsequent grading period. A copy of their child's kindergarten skills checklist was also sent home twice during the year.

Parents were also encouraged to attend school events. The children made invitations and invited their parents to watch plays in the classroom, sample some of their cooking, and view their work on display. Parent and child activities were also scheduled during each grading period. These activities were scheduled for Saturday mornings and included a continental breakfast. Parents were encouraged to borrow books and materials from the classroom for at-home use.

A whole language program integrates the content curriculum objects around topics or themes. For the purpose of this practicum, coordinated curriculum components were developed. The County Balanced Curriculum objectives for each subject were combined to form a unified whole that would have meaning for the students. The units of study provided direction for the class and stimulated language, cognitive and academic growth.

The extensive use of children's literature throughout this practicum was of utmost importance.

Books and stories were integrated into each coordinated curriculum component and served to stimulate oral language and listening skills, introduce science, social studies, and math concepts, and to reinforce language arts and readiness skills. Children's books provided information and stimulated cognitive growth as well as serving as catalysts for numerous follow-up projects and interdisciplinary activities. The media specialist was extremely helpful in gathering books and multi-media materials which were incorporated into each coordinated curriculum component.

During each unit of study the children had numerous and varied opportunities to become actively involved with children's literature. They assisted in making costumes and dramatizing simple stories. They also made puppets of the characters and participated in various arts and crafts projects. The follow-up activities often stimulated further interest in related books and in the units of study themselves. The students thoroughly enjoyed "rereading" any books that had been shared with the class.

In addition, a videotape was made as the culminating activity to a coordinated curriculum

component. After preparing costumes and gathering props, the children performed a play, sang related songs, described a class project, and read their own language experience books. The children exhibited a great deal of pride in their accomplishments and were anxious to undertake similar endeavors.

The children were further motivated by the attention that they received for their work. The media specialist shared the videotape with other primary classes and, as a result, teachers, and other students often remarked of their activities. The children received a great deal of attention and satisfaction as they invited other classes to watch them perform, produced bulletin board displays for the media center and hallways, and welcomed numerous visitors and observers.

In addition to the wide use of children's literature, the children were extensively involved in producing their own books. As a part of each coordinated curriculum component the students made their own books. Student-made materials allowed the children to participate actively in the learning process, provided meaningful classroom experiences and highlighted content or basic skills curriculum objectives.

During this practicum the students illustrated caption books, dictated stories for picture books, tape recorded and illustrated well-known stories, made ABC books and language experience books about field trips and class visitors. Individual books became a part of the children's personal libraries at home while the books that were contributed to by the class as a whole became part of the classroom library.

Various methods and materials were employed throughout this practicum to foster the development of oral language and pre-literacy skills. Building a bridge among the aspects of the communication process--listening, speaking, reading, and writing, then, was an important process.

In addition to the class book and the individual language experience books, each child kept a journal. Every week the children drew a picture and "wrote" their own stories. As had been anticipated, emergent writing was evident in the student journals. Many of the children began by writing scribbles which later included spaces symbolizing words. Still later, letters, classmates' names, and then actual words taken from language experience charts and personal vocabularies were evident in the journals. After

each entry the children "read" their stories to the class and this quickly became a well-loved activity. During one such session a student asked me to read his story for him when another child interjected, "She can't read your writing!" The journals were, indeed, viewed as personal treasures.

Establishing a cooperative learning environment within the classroom was an important aspect of this practicum. In order to facilitate this,the writer enrolled in a cooperative learning in-service program offered by the county's Teacher Education Center. The children were provided with opportunities to interact with their peers as well as with the materials. Cooperative learning resulted from large and small group discussions, various play situations and learning center activities. The children were encouraged to work together and to assist one another at work and at play. They often completed specific projects or assignments with a "partner." The children were, then, provided with opportunities to practice the interpersonal and language skills that they were expected to master.

In order for cooperative learning to take place, however, the children must be equipped with appropriate social skills. To this end, this writer

participated in a county-sponsored in-service and received training in the I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) program that is limitedly available through the school system. ICPS was taught in small groups in conjunction with the guidance counselor for a nine-week period. The program utilized puppets, role playing, games, and discussions and took the children through a carefully sequenced set of activities which were designed to provide them with the skills that would enable them to select appropriate alternative behaviors by using the problem-solving process. The ICPs program was instrumental in assisting the children to interact with one another appropriately by teaching them to anticipate the consequences of their behavior and by providing them with the necessary skills to select alternative behaviors and resolve conflict amicably.

The active participation of the children in the learning process was an important aspect of this practicum. The students were provided with numerous opportunities to select activities, determine the direction of their investigations, and discuss and/or record their thoughts and findings. Group activities and projects always involved language experience stories, charts, and/or books which underscored the

relationship between spoken and written words in a meaningful way. The children witnessed their thoughts and words being recorded and transformed into something of worth. They knew that their stories would be displayed and that they would be read over and over again. The children took a great deal of pride in their work as their desire to read was stimulated and nurtured.

Students must be motivated if they are expected to be active participants in classroom activities and events. Classroom experiences were made relevant and meaningful to the learners in order to capture student interest and attention. The children were provided opportunities to make decisions and suggestions and to participate in the life of the class. Each coordinated curriculum component included crafts, cooking, and projects which the children found to be highly stimulating hands-on experiences.

This practicum provided many experiences within the classroom and without. The coordinated curriculum components often included outside resources and field trips. Parents and community workers came to speak with the class during career week. The class took neighborhood walks, and field

trips were taken to the Seaquarium, a farm, and to the downtown area by public transportation. These activities, of course, were incorporated into the coordinated curriculum components. Each included language experience activities and the compilation of a class book where each child drew a picture and dictated his/her own contribution to the book.

The students also participated in a pen pal project. They corresponded regularly with a kindergarten class at another elementary school in the community. Each child was assigned a pen pal to whom language experience stories and pictures were sent. The pen pal project culminated with a picnic at a neighborhood park. The children were extremely anxious to meet the children with whom they had been communicating all year. The pen pal project stimulated interest in the entire communication process in a way that was meaningful to the children. They were anxious to tell their pen pals about things that were important to them and they were thrilled to receive mail, especially because one of the parents who came to school was a letter carrier.

Whole language programs have been shown to be valuable, especially for low SES and minority populations in that every effort is made to bridge

cultural gaps and acknowledge each child's personal situation and experiences as important learning events. It was the intent of this practicum to implement such a program and to generate interest in extending whole language activities beyond kindergarten and into the primary grades. To achieve this end, a teacher in-service was conducted which introduced the primary teachers to whole language practices. Information was also shared about this practicum's objectives and progress. Teachers were encouraged to visit the classroom, talk with the children, and borrow materials and/or resources for use in their own classrooms.

As a result of the amount of interest that was generated in the whole language approach by this practicum, an educational expert in the field and a representative of a whole language publishing company were invited to provide a follow-up in-service for the primary and interested exceptional student education teachers. This in-service, too, generated much interest in the faculty. Teachers were encouraged to implement whole language activities in their classrooms and to share their experiences with their colleagues through informal discussions and a whole language newsletter. Although there was much

interest and activity in this area, many teachers were reluctant to provide written contributions or to be highlighted in a newsletter. It was decided, then, that the grade level teams would meet with the primary grade chairperson to share ideas, materials, and resources and to assist one another with future whole language endeavors.

The success of the in-service workshops and the subsequent grade level meetings can be evidenced by the kindergarten teachers' decision to expand the program and provide a whole language curriculum in all of the kindergarten classes next year. Similarly, many teachers have requested that whole language kits and literature series be ordered for their classrooms for use next year. Teachers have demonstrated increased interest in whole language activities, then, rather than teaching skills in isolation as has been common practice.

Also in response to the faculty's interest in this practicum, this writer was asked by the principal to write a grant for the school. The grant monies were awarded and will be spent to further in-service the faculty about a school-wide whole language program that a team of teachers, including this writer, observed and investigated and to write

new curriculum that would address the needs of the children in this community specifically.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Many of the children entered the kindergarten program lacking the necessary readiness skills for success in school. They evidenced poorly developed language and listening skills, poor social skills, and delayed cognitive development. The children had severely limited receptive and expressive vocabularies and demonstrated an inability to discuss objects, events, and ideas age appropriately.

Oral language competence is a vital prerequisite to developing literacy and to academic achievement. Fostering oral language development, then, was the focal point of this practicum. The first objective or this practicum was to increase the students' receptive and expressive vocabularies by six months as measured by the ROWPVT and the EOWPVT. The students were tested with these instruments in the beginning of the school year and again at the end. A comparison of the students' original and retest scores can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary and Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test and Retest Results

	ROWPVT Age Equivalent Scores		EOWPVT Mental Age Scores	
Student	Test	Retest	Test	Retest
1	2-7	5-7	2-5	5-5
2	2-4	4-10	2-4	4-1
3	2-5	3-9	2-6	3-8
4	3-2	4-10	2-6	4-8
5	3-7	5-8	3-4	4-1
6	4-11	6-6	4-8	6-3
7	4-9	5-8	4-5	4-9
8	2-4	3-8	2-1	3-9
9	4-2	5-3	4-9	5-6
10	4-2	6-8	4-7	4-11
11	4-7	5-4	4-8	5-0
12	3-7	4-10	4-2	5-8
13	6-0	6-6	4-9	6-3
14	4-10	5-8	5-0	6-4
15	4-6	5-11	4-4	4-11
16	4-11	5-11	5-0	7-3
17	4-7	5-5	7-0	6-5
18	3-3	4-2	3-8	4-8
19	4-9	4-9	3-10	5-11
20	5-1	5-2	5-2	5-8

It had been anticipated that 15 out of the 20 students would improve their test scores by at least six months. As can be seen in Table 3, this objective was clearly met. The ROWPVT scores revealed that 18 out of the 20 students achieved at least a six-month gain in age equivalent scores, with an average gain of 16 months. Similarly, the students' expressive vocabularies were also increased substantially. The EOWPVT mental age scores were increased, not by the anticipated six months, but by an average of 19 months. One student even had a consistent three year gain on both the ROWPVT and the EOWPVT. It can be seen, then, that this practicum was successful in its attempt to foster oral language development.

The tremendous improvement in the children's vocabularies was extremely heartening; however, this was only one aspect of the attempt to stimulate oral language development. The children were expected, as well, to improve their use of appropriate language structures. The second objective of this practicum was to increase the students' use of appropriate language structures in 16 of the 20 children. The children were provided with a great many opportunities to expand their language use through

story telling, dramatic play, language experience stories, and other classroom activities throughout the school year. This objective was monitored by recording student responses during informal student evaluations. The students were expected to dictate grammatically correct sentences to achieve satisfaction of this objective. Information gathered through the informal evaluations was recorded in the teacher's log and provided important information which contributed to the children's report cards and informal progress reports. This objective, too, was met and was documented in the teacher's log, in student work folders, and on student report cards.

Student progress in all areas was closely monitored by informal teacher evaluations during each coordinated curriculum component. The students were asked to talk about a specific object related to the unit of study. Student responses were then recorded and later evaluated for use of appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and for the child's general level of knowledge. These evaluations revealed whether or not the children were actually using the new vocabulary and language structures that they were being exposed to in class. Also, these analyses of the children's grasp of the content of the units of

study precluded formal evaluation of student progress in these areas. It was not difficult to determine a child's general comprehension of a specific topic by reviewing his/her own statements on the subject.

Not only did these informal evaluations provide a great deal of information about student progress, but they were extremely popular with the children. After recording their responses, the children illustrated their stories and were encouraged to include as much detail as possible from their oral statements. These language experience stories were then used as bulletin board displays or for books. The children took a great deal of pride in their work and thoroughly enjoyed the activities. In this manner student progress was closely monitored but was devoid of pressure and anxiety. The children enjoyed having an opportunity to talk about the coordinated curriculum components and to produce something personally valuable.

The relationship between oral language development and cognitive growth has been made clear. It had been anticipated that student achievement would increase along with the children's oral language competence. The third objective of this practicum was to increase the students' CPI scores to

90 percent mastery in 15 out of 20 children. A comparison of the children's CPI scores can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Cooperative Preschool Inventory Test and Retest Results

Student	CPI Score	Retest Score
1	41	63
2	37	60
3	31	58
4	38	51
5	37	59
6	56	62
7	55	63
8	21	48
9	36	59
10	54	64
11	37	58
12	59	62
13	60	64
14	60	63
15	39	58
16	59	64
17	62	63

(Continued on Page 91)

Cooperative Preschool Inventory Test and Retest Results (continued)

Student	CPI Score	Retest Score
18	35	58
19	36	58
20	59	64

As can be seen in Table 4, 18 of the 20 students scored at least 58 of a possible 64 points. They did achieve, then, at least 90 percent mastery of the items on the CPI.

Where the CPI revealed the children's general areas of strength and weakness, specific academic information was not provided. In addition to the CPI, then, the kindergarten skills checklist was used periodically throughout the school year to monitor student progress in the basic skills areas. The same form was used throughout the year and individual skills were checked as mastery was achieved. (See Appendix B.)

As one would expect, the children evidenced quite varied levels of readiness for the kindergarten program at the beginning of the school year. While some students demonstrated an adequate experiential and academic background, others, indeed, demonstrated a lack

thereof. At the first evaluation with the kindergarten skills checklist, however, none of the students had 50 items checked and several children had as few as five. It was anticipated that 10 of the 20 children would achieve 80 percent mastery of the kindergarten basic skills objectives as measured by the kindergarten skills checklist. Where the kindergarten skills checklist did not reveal a score, but, instead, identified specific academic objectives which had been met, an analysis of each child's record form revealed whether or not mastery in each area had been achieved. The analyses of the kindergarten skills checklists revealed that 14 of the 20 students achieved at least 80 percent mastery of the kindergarten basic skills objectives.

Throughout this practicum the children were involved in many activities and events designed to stimulate oral language and cognitive development. It was essential to the success of this practicum that the children possess the ability to interact appropriately with the materials and with one another in learning centers and large and small group activities. The fifth objective of this practicum, then, was that 15 of the 20 children would demonstrate cooperative learning behaviors at any

given time as measured by teacher observation and collegial classroom observations. Several teachers were asked to observe in the classroom for periods of 15 to 30 minutes, specifically to observe and record any independent cooperative learning behaviors that were demonstrated. The observers took extensive narrative notes about what was happening in different areas of the room and often captured whole exchanges between children involved in a situation which required the resolution of conflict.

As the observers were free to walk around the room and were devoid of responsibility to the children, they were in an excellent position to notice trouble spots or minor conflicts that often escaped the classroom teacher and paraprofessional who were often engaged in specific activities themselves. The colleague observations revealed that at least 15 of the 20 children demonstrated cooperative learning behaviors during the observation sessions. Indeed, it would have been impossible to function had inappropriate behavior been exhibited by a large number of children at any one time. The ICPS program contributed greatly to the realization of this practicum objective which was evidenced in

collegial post-observation conferences and on student report cards.

The parent participation component of this practicum was extremely important. As the community and home environments contributed substantially to the difficulties that the children experienced with language and cognitive development, it was important to focus a great deal of attention on parent education and involvement. This practicum attempted to train parents in methods of assisting their children with school work and ways to reinforce curriculum objectives at home with at least one contact per week. This objective was clearly met through the distribution of weekly newsletters, bulletins and parent information letters, phone calls, conferences and Parent and Child activities. All of the parents participated to the extent that all written communications were received by all of the parents and all parents participated in at least one conference or telephone conversation. They responded differently to other efforts to include them in classroom activities and events, however.

It was hoped that parents would be recruited and trained as classroom volunteers as well, but this was not possible. Family structures and responsibilities

as well as work and school schedules often precluded the parents' ability to be available during school hours. Emphasis was placed, then, on training parents in methods of assisting their children with school-related tasks at home.

Parent and Child activities were scheduled for Saturdays to allow for the maximum amount of parent participation. The materials that were discussed and distributed were designed to provide parents with specific activities that could be employed at home to reinforce the curriculum objectives that were being taught in school. Parents created materials to be used for at-home activities and borrowed actual instructional materials from the classroom. None of the parents attended all of the Parent and Child activities, although 12 parents attended at least one.

In addition to the materials and activity suggestions that were distributed to parents, homework assignments were also designed which demanded that parents and children work together. Once per week the children were assigned a task that they were unable to complete independently. These assignments included a language experience story bout a field trip and a weekend event, making a book about

a family activity, illustrating a book after it had been read at home, completing a science experiment and charting the results, and practicing poems and finger plays to be recited in class. In this way, even those parents who did not regularly assist their children with school work at home became involved in at least these specific activities.

The final objective of this practicum was to train the primary teachers in whole language objectives and methods. It was hoped that interest in whole language teaching practices would result from a teacher in-service and follow-up activities, thereby broadening the impact of this practicum. The primary teachers attended two in-service workshops about the whole language approach and participated in follow-up discussions and planning sessions during grade level team meetings. At these times, ideas, materials, and teacher resources were shared to facilitate the introduction of whole language activities into the classroom. All of the teachers will be further involved in an extensive in-service as the team that observed and investigated the whole language school in New York City reports its findings. The primary teachers will have further opportunities to embrace whole language teaching

practices as a team of primary teachers, including this writer, will write new curricula with the balance of the grant monies. It is anticipated that much emphasis will be placed on providing whole language programs in the primary grades. The satisfaction of this objective is evident in the expansion of whole language curricula throughout the kindergarten program and in the faculty's level of interest in whole language materials and teaching strategies.

Conclusions

It has been shown that this practicum was extremely successful in achieving its objectives. Not only did the students evidence tremendous gains in oral language abilities, in both vocabulary and improved language structure, but academic achievement was, as well, substantial. The children demonstrated cooperative learning behaviors and were generally enthusiastic about classroom activities and events. There was an increased level of parent interest and involvement as a result of this practicum as well.

Student progress was measured in a variety of ways throughout this practicum. Where not all students performed up to specific predetermined standards, all of the students demonstrated progress

and achievement commensurate with their abilities. It is not realistic to judge all students by the same standards. The children's progress was measured not by where they wound up, but by how far they had come. In this way it was easy to identify those students who evidenced difficulty in a certain area as well as those who were making satisfactory (or extraordinary) progress in spite of previously limited experiential backgrounds.

The use of frequent informal evaluations in this way allowed for maximum measurement of student progress and, at the same time, contributed greatly to establishing a risk-free, nurturing classroom environment. The children enjoyed having this time alone with the teacher in a situation in which they felt in control. The children often did not know that they were being evaluated and, therefore, participated in evaluative exercises with the same level of interest and enthusiasm as other classroom activities.

Maintaining an appropriate classroom climate was an essential component of this practicum. Although student progress was monitored frequently, it was important that the students felt free to interact with one another and with classroom materials. They

were encouraged to talk and assist one another at work and at play. A great deal of emphasis was placed on teaching the social skills that were essential for the maintenance of a nurturing classroom environment.

This practicum was also successful in its impact on the parents. Not only did test scores and teacher's logs indicate that the children made great strides, but parental attitudes and practices, too, were altered. At the end of the school year the parents were asked the same questions that they had been asked at the practicum's inception. (See Appendix C.)

Where many of the aspects of the home environment remained the same, the information that was gathered at the end of the practicum yielded heartening results. The changes that occurred in the home were parent, not child, related. The children still watched the same television shows, enjoyed the same activities, etc., but the behaviors of the parents had changed markedly. Due, in part, to the availability of the materials in the classroom library, many parents indicated that children's books were available and that the children were read to more often in the home. Further, several parents

said that they had visited and attended a scheduled activity at the public library with their children. Parents also revealed that they more frequently made time to play with their children and spent more time helping with school-related tasks. Most parents stated that they talked more with their children and that they talked about school each day, even if for a short time.

This practicum, then, was successful in its attempts to provide a kindergarten program that would stimulate oral language and cognitive growth as well as interest and motivate parents to become more involved in their children's education. It was successful, as well, in stimulating interest and enthusiasm among the faculty in whole language teaching/learning practices. The entire school was affected by this practicum in that it will be continued and expanded next year (and hopefully in subsequent years). As more and more students and teachers become involved in whole language programs, its impact will reach into the community as well.

Recommendations

This practicum is one that could be implemented in a variety of settings. It could be easily adapted

to meet the educational and emotional needs of the children in any primary classroom. Teacher enthusiasm and dedication are paramount to the program's success in that the smooth functioning of a whole language program requires a tremendous amount of time and teacher planning.

The following recommendations for implementing a primary whole language program are those that have been identified in the research. These recommendations are:

1. Children must be active participants in the language learning process and they must be engaged in activities that allow for experimentation with listening, talking, reading and writing.

2. The focus of the program must be on meaningful experiences and on meaningful language by building on what the children already know about oral language.

3. Opportunities must be provided for children to express what they know, think, and feel in order to stimulate both cognitive and affective development in conjunction with developing oral language competence.

4. Reading experiences must be a part of an integrated communication process. Listening,

speaking, reading, and writing must be coordinated with other curriculum and content areas.

5. The classroom environment must ensure success for all children and should provide a nurturing atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and experimentation with language.

In addition, several other factors must be addressed if this practicum were to be replicated. The administration and other faculty members are key ingredients to a successful whole language program. The following recommendations, then, are made:

6. Establish a reasonable class size. A ratio of 18:1 is ideal although the class size can be increased slightly if a paraprofessional is assigned and the classroom affords sufficient space.

7. Acquire sufficient financial and material resources to provide a rich experiential base of projects and activities.

8. Plan ahead. Gathering a wealth of resources and producing teacher-made materials is quite time consuming but absolutely essential to the program's success.

9. Educate the parents and faculty about the program's objectives and gather support by keeping them abreast of what is going on in the classroom.

10. Take advantage of the expertise of the school's media specialist in locating any and all related materials that are available in the school and through community resources.

Dissemination

The results of this practicum were shared with the faculty and the administrators of the school. First this practicum was discussed with the other kindergarten teachers. It had been anticipated that discussion of the results of this practicum would lead to a decision to plan similar activities together and include them as an integral part of the kindergarten program for the coming school year. Indeed, the kindergarten teachers had already begun to incorporate some of this practicum's activities and objectives into their classrooms. They had already demonstrated a willingness and a desire to implement whole language programs. They decided, then, to pursue the expansion of this practicum into the entire kindergarten program next year.

The kindergarten teachers' decision, based on the results of this practicum, was discussed thoroughly with the Educational Cabinet. Plans have already been made to order appropriate manipulative and teacher resource materials. Whole language kits

and children's literature have been ordered for each classroom in lieu of workbooks. The results of this practicum, then, have been shared with members of the faculty and the Educational Cabinet and will be brought to the attention of the entire faculty as the new kindergarten program gets underway.

Similarly, the results of this practicum will be brought to the attention of parents and community members as the objectives and rationale for the new kindergarten program are explained to them at the kindergarten orientation meeting prior to the new school year. Parent and community support will be sought which will further disseminate information about the practicum.

The results of this practicum will also be shared with other schools in the county. SBM/SDM schools already participate in an elaborate networking system to share their innovations and projects with schools that are considering SBM/SDM. In this way, successful projects are publicized and brought to the attention of the faculties and administrations of other schools also interested in improving the educational system.

This practicum was also brought to the attention of the Office of School Based Management/Shared

Decision Making. Each year the SBM/SDM schools are required to conduct an evaluation. This school conducts a goal free evaluation so that the merits of the school's projects can be considered in light of their objectives and overall impact on the school. Activities and objectives of this practicum were included to a great extent in this year's evaluation. This practicum, then, was included in the SBM/SDM annual evaluation as one of the accomplishments of this pilot project.

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Name _____ Dates _____

Kindergarten Skills Checklist

I can name these letters.

___ A	___ a
___ B	___ b
___ C	___ c
___ D	___ d
___ E	___ e
___ F	___ f
___ G	___ g
___ H	___ h
___ I	___ i
___ J	___ j
___ K	___ k
___ L	___ l
___ M	___ m
___ N	___ n
___ O	___ o
___ P	___ p
___ Q	___ q
___ R	___ r
___ S	___ s
___ T	___ t
___ U	___ u
___ V	___ v
___ W	___ w
___ X	___ x
___ Y	___ y
___ Z	___ z

I know these letter sounds.

___ B	___ N
___ C	___ P
___ D	___ Q
___ F	___ R
___ G	___ S
___ H	___ T
___ J	___ V
___ K	___ W
___ L	___ Y
___ M	___ Z

___ I can rhyme words.

___ I can say the days of the week.

I can name the coins:

___ penny
___ nickel
___ dime

___ I can write my name.

I can count objects:

___ up to 5
___ up to 10
___ above 10

I can name these numerals.

___ 0	___ 4	___ 8
___ 1	___ 5	___ 9
___ 2	___ 6	___ 10
___ 3	___ 7	

I can read these words:

___ red	___ down
___ blue	___ go
___ yellow	___ here
___ green	___ I
___ purple	___ is
___ orange	___ it
___ green	___ jump
___ brown	___ like
___ black	___ little
___ zero	___ look
___ one	___ me
___ two	___ my
___ three	___ on
___ four	___ out
___ five	___ run
___ six	___ see
___ seven	___ the
___ eight	___ there
___ nine	___ this
___ ten	___ to
___ a	___ up
___ an	___ we
___ at	___ with
___ big	___ you
___ can	___ cat

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What does your child like to do most?

   _____

2. Does your child have any particular interests?

   _____

3. Who does your child most often play with?

   _____

4. What are your child's favorite things to play with?

   _____ _____

5. How does your child feel about school?

   _____

6. Do you feel that homework is important in kindergarten?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   Why or why not?_____

7. Do you or someone in your household help your child with his/her homework?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   Who?_____

8. What do you like to do most as a family?

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. Are children's books available in your home?

   Yes ___ No ___

10. How often do you or someone in your home read to your child?

    _____

11. Do you use the public library with your child?

    Yes ___ No ___

12. Approximately how many hours per week do you play with your child?

    _____

13. Do you think that kindergarten is important?

    Yes ___ No ___

    Why or why not? _____

    _____

14. What other services would you like the school to provide you or your child, if any?

    _____

    _____

    _____